



“How Was School?”  
Interviews with Disabled People about their experience of  
Education over the last 100 years

Esther Annenberg  
Interviewed by Chloe Bowles

Interview ref.:C1559/22

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<b>Interviewee's forename:</b>	Esther	<b>Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Occupation:</b>	Retired	<b>Date and place of birth:</b>	1909, Upton Park, London
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Sold stuff / fabrics	<b>Father's occupation:</b>	Bus Conductor
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[Track 1]

*So ETTY, for the recording can you tell me your full name?*

Full name is Esther Garcia.

*Esther Garcia.*

That's my single name.

*So, 'cos the name I've got on your form is Esther Annenberg.*

Annenberg yes.

*Is that right?*

Yes.

*Is that your name now?*

Yeah.

*OK. And what year were you born Esther?*

1909.

*1909! And, and most people call you 'ETTY' don't they?*

Pardon?

*Most people call you Etty.*

Yes.

*So is that what I should call you today? Etty OK. [Slight bump] OK Etty so, oh look the mic's fallen off. So what was it like, when you were born, where did you live?*

We lived in Coborn Road, Bow.

*In Bow?*

Number nine.

*Is that in London?*

In a house with my mother's sister, 'cos the two sisters always lived together.

*Did they?*

Auntie 'ad the upstairs and we 'ad the down, 'cos of me. [Voices in background]

*'Cos of you?*

Yeah, 'cos I couldn't walk prop'ly, and that, and that,

*That was from*

Yeah.

*That was from birth?*

[01:22]

That was so I could see out the window and people go by you know. And then when I did start to go out, they used to walk, kids used to come behind me and always say 'Oh she's [doesn't say word] self and that, now you know, it used to make me feel awful and I used to go back 'ome and cry and my mum used to pick me up and try to pacify me. I think I made her feel unhappy though: because I mean I couldn't do nothing to help her, and yet, she could help me: it didn't make sense to me at the time I s'pose, 'cos you don't understand and I could never understand why people, mocked you when you walked.

*Hm. That was when you were very little was it?*

Yeah.

*Yeah. So when you were first born,*

[02:16]

I don't know what happened. Mumma may have fell and hurt her knee, and it came out on me, when I was born, 'cos she was carryin' me at the time.

*And she had a fall?*

Mm.

*Oh.*

And she hurt her knee 'cos, stead of it her, it come on me when I was born and I think I'm bent, me leg bent that way, same as me arm, and they twisted it round to do it, and they must have done something down here because me bones go 'cos, when you're young your bones are very brittle, I mean they could do what they liked in those days.

[03:02]

I was in Great Ormond Street Hospital for four years.

*Were you?*

Mm.

*What age was that Etty? What, how old were you when you were there?*

Only young.

*I think, did you tell me that you were three when you went to that hospital?*

Two.

*Two! You were two when you went to Great Ormond Street. Mm. And you were there four years! And what was that like?*

Well I used to cry more 'cos [laughing] I wanted to go home.

*Yeah.*

And I wanted me mum all the time.

*Yeah.*

'Cos you couldn't stop there all the time, they wouldn't let her.

*They wouldn't let her stay.*

No. They wouldn't you don't have visitors then like you do today.

*Mm.*

And when you're in the hospital in those days they weren't very good to you, but I mean the thing is it's so funny when I can't think what caused it, you know, but when people used to mock you, say 'Oh she's messed herself' and I could never understand that.

*No.*

I didn't know what they were talkin' about, 'cos you see I 'ad to swing round and then back again, [clears throat] and I s'pose they used to think I'd messed meself every time I done that.

*Did anyone talk to your mum about it?*

No I don't think I did.

*Did doctors talk to her or,*

Mm. I know I cried a lot. 'Cos you don't understand what it's all about when you're that age anyway, you don't know what's going to happen do you?

*No. So no-one explained why you were in hospital?*

No.

*Right.*

[05:00]

Shame. I always remember my eldest brother, 'cos you know he went in a lion's den, when he was sixteen, he was in Sheffield I think at the time, and they had a photo of 'im taken in the lion's den.

*What a real lion's den?*

Yeah.

*What was he doin' in there?*

He went in there for a dare, oh he was a dare devil! He said he done it so as he could get the money for me to have operations, and that and they made a big deal of it didn't they, oh, I'll never forget that, [voices in background] I always remember 'im coming home, and he said to me 'Etty you're goin' to have a surprise ' he said "cos people are coming down to see you,' they wanted to know what it was all about, and [laughing] I didn't know what it was all about, never mind them. But he was a dare devil my eldest brother. Mm. Shame 'e died; he died in Israel.

*Did he?*

[06:08]

He's buried out there.

*Is he? Mm.*

He overlooks Jerusalem.

*Oh. And how old were you when that happened?*

Pardon?

*How old were you when that happened?*

I don't know.

*A long time ago.*

Mm, no I mean it's a shocking thing when you think of it, people take the mickey out of a kid, and grown ups doin' it as well, and I, I didn't understand meself, never mind about them: you know, it's a horrible thing, and when they started walking like that and I thought 'What are they doing that for?'

*They were copying?*

Mm.

*Mm. Mm.*

But they when they used to say 'Oh look she's messed herself,' oh, I could never understand it: and I asked my mum and that one day, 'cos my dad wouldn't take me out, 'cos my mum said 'If your father took you out and they said it he'd have sloshed them.'

*Mm.*

No it's a shocking thing. Why do people take the mickey out of someone else?

*Mm, I don't know. It doesn't feel good does it?*

No. I could never understand, I thought grown ups had more, guts than that but apparently they couldn't 'ave 'ad.

*That's right.*

Not if they'd, let people do it, you know and they helped 'em as well. I could, I don't know I don't understand it. I wish I did.

*Mm. So, so you were in hospital for four years. What do you remember about hospital?*

[08:00]

Great Ormond Street, mm.

*What happened, what was the day like while you were in there?*

Oh not bad 'cos I stayed in bed most of the time. I 'ad me legs slung up in the air on a sling and they used to come and swing them. [Both laugh.]

*So they were good to you there were they?*

Oh yeah. Yeah.

*Were you happy there? What do you remember feeling?*

[08:30]

But I've got a lovely son: you'd love my David, and my Brian, two lovely boys bless them, but my mother-in-law she, she didn't like me, she said 'You took my son' I said 'I didn't,' I said 'We were in love and that's the what' I said 'You left your mum didn't you?' I said 'Your son,' I said 'yours while he's a baby but when he's grown up and goes out into the world he's his own man,' and I said 'And what happened? We met and fell in love,' I said 'and that was it.' Oh she thought it was terrible. Mm. 'Taking my son away' she

said,' I said 'I hadn't taken him away.' But she got him in the end, he went back to Mum, so that's why I always tell everybody 'Never marry a mummy's boy,' oh no it's horrible honestly. I can never understand that.

*Mm. So can we think, can we think back to earlier.*

Pardon?

*Can we think back to before you were married when you were at school age? What happened after hospital Etty?*

[09:46]

Well I, I can't remember a lot, 'cos every day was alike you know, there was nothing exciting happened then.

*No.*

And that and, [clears throat] when they came out, as I said I couldn't walk at the time and I started, my brother got up and walked out the gate, I thought 'If he should do that I can do that,' and I got up out of me chair and walked and followed him,

*Did you?*

and I used to swing round like that, and they used to say 'Ooh look she's messed 'erself.'

*That was when you lived at home was it?*

Mm.

*Yeah. So was that kind of children out on the street that you were playing out or, yeah?*

I don't understand that, I could never understand why people used to take the mickey out of me. I mean I didn't realise I walked different to them. You don't not when you're a kid do you? Not when you see somebody else walking you, automatically do it.

*That's right.*

I mean whoever told me at the time I'd get up and do it, I would have called them liars 'cos, I think the doctor told my mum I would never walk,

*That's what the doctor said.*

[Talking together] but I did.

*The doctor said you would never would walk. Mm.*

Funny I don't know how, why I done it, I know I saw him get up and go and I thought to myself 'What's he doin'? I want to see him' and I got up and followed 'im, [laughing] I didn't realise what I was doin', and my mumma come in she 'ad a shock! I think she cried, 'cos she as I say she 'ad a fall and it came out on me instead of her, 'cos she was carryin' me at the time.

*Mm. So so Etty after hospital you went and lived back home with your mum, and your dad, was your dad there as well? Mum and dad?*

Yeah.

*And did you have brothers and sisters, you've talked about your brother.*

No sister, brothers.

*How many brothers?*

Two.

*Two. And were they both older than you?*

Mm, no one younger one older, I was in the middle. [Laughs.]

*And what was that like?*

Funny really. I thought all sister and brothers were like that but they weren't, not when you go out and you meet other people, you know, they say 'That's my brother or my sister,' they were older and younger than them and I couldn't understand that at the time. But it was really lovely you know. I had, I always remember I know when my brother got up and walked, and I thought to meself 'What's he doing?' and I didn't realise I was doin' it. I got up out of me chair and walked. My mum couldn't believe it; I think she broke down, and my dad as well. Though they didn't stop me from walkin'. But as I say people used to say 'She's messed herself' you know and that, and I could never understand that was all about, well you don't when you're young. I mean I don't expect grown ups to do it, but I think they were worse than kids. I mean a child I could understand, but I could never understand them: 'cos I, thought they had more sense but apparently they were worse than me. [Laughs.] No it's a horrible thing really to think people take the mickey out of you. I wonder why?

*Did that happen a lot Etty?*

Yes, unfortunately.

*Mm. And did it go on for a long time?*

[14:01]

Mm. 'Til I was fifteen, and I went in hospital and they pulled me legs down to what they are today.

*So you had an operation at fifteen.*

I've got a body, no-one'd have a body like me: got no bottom.

*Oh!*

They took that all away, it's all cut. My mum said if she could, there was an advert in the paper sayin' they'd found a girl, all scarred she'd say 'It's my Etty.' [Laughs.]

*Did you have lots of operations then?*

Yeah.

*Did you? So you were in and out of hospital a lot were you?*

Yeah.

*Yeah. Mm.*

But now I'm straight. It's marvellous really when you think of it, but unfortunately I still can't walk. I did for a bit: but my two children love me, and my grandchildren, oh it's lovely to see them, honestly they're lovely.

*Mm. How many have you got Etty?*

[15:19]

Oh I'm a big family.

*Lots?*

Mm. From two boys I've got a great big family. I wouldn't do without them though. When I had the money, I shared it all between the kids and I said 'Now you're all finished, what you've got is yours,' I said 'but what is left is mine.' I said 'I hope you never want any more' and they said 'Mum, if we need any help,' but I said 'Ah that's different. If you want help, yes, but no, not anything else.' They said 'OK,' and they said 'How about if you want help?' I said 'Well I'll come to you!' [Laughs.] And they said 'Mum, you won't have to, because we'll help you anyway' and I thought I sat there and [laughing] cried my eyes out. It's a shocking thing though really, I don't understand people. I s'pose they still do it today.

*Hopefully not as much.*

Well today I'd turn round and tell 'em off, because I'd turn round and say 'Look, you don't know what's in front of you,' I said 'If anybody had told me I was goin' to end in a chair,' I said 'I'd have called 'em liars.' I said 'But I did,' [voices in background] I said 'and

it was through a slight accident on my mum's side' I said, come out on me instead of her.' I said 'It could happen to you, you don't know,' I said 'and you won't like it,' I says 'especially if you go behind like you get done me, taking the mickey,' I said 'Don't you ever do that again,' I says 'cos you should put your hands together and say 'Thank God, I'm perfect' I says 'cos I'm not, you are.' I said 'I thank God I'm 'ere' I said 'and I've got me brain,' I said 'that's one thing I never lost,' I said 'if we've gotta lose anything it's best to lose your brain than your limbs, because what you don't remember can't hurt anybody then can it? Only you,' but I mean the thing is, people are very horrible, and I don't underst, as I say even today I don't understand it.

*Mm, it sounds like it's hurt you a lot.*

Yes.

*Mm.*

Because I, I can't understand why grownups do it, I mean alright, with a child I'll say 'Yes,' but you can explain it to a child and they come up and say 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do it,' I say 'Yeah I understand that love,' I said 'but never take the mickey out of anyone' I said 'cos my mum always used to say 'It comes home to roost.' They looked at me, I said 'Yes,' I said 'you don't know what's in front of you,' I said 'and that's true,' I said because you go right through life' I said 'and nothing and all of sudden goes bump!' I said 'and it stops, and you're caught' and they looked at me and

they said 'Do you mean that?' I said 'Yes.' They said 'Well we'll never do it again' and I said 'No don't you ever do that again.'  
[Voices in the background.] Who's that?

*Dunno, it's a bit noisy out there isn't it? [Laughs.]*

No I mean it's a shocking thing when people do it. Have you seen anybody do you think like that?

*I've heard about people doing things like that, yeah. Mm.*

I wonder why?

*Mm.*

I mean surely, in their mind they must know that, you can't put that on, if you are doing things like I know if I could get up and walk now, and I'd do the same I suppose. How can you take the mickey out of them?

*So Etty, just to go back, after hospital did you go to school?*

[20:10]

Yes I had to go to a special school.

*Did you, and what, do you know what age that was?*

When I was five.

*When you were five, and what*

I used to go across the Rye, and I thought I was in a house of the country. [Laughs] 'Cos they used to take me in an ambulance.

*Yeah, was that Peckham Rye?*

Yeah.

*Yeah. What do you know the school's name?*

I used to go Faringdon Road, across the other side of the road, and that, and I used to think 'I'm goin' through the country.'

*So you used to go from home, to the school?*

Mm.

*So it wasn't a boarding school?*

No!

*No you still lived at home. And what was the name of the school Etty?*

Venetian Road.

*Venetian Road? And what was that school like then?*

Very nice. We had a girl there she couldn't walk at all, she was like in a spinal carriage: you don't see that now. What's happened to all that I wonder? 'Cos they can't, [phone in background] she couldn't walk and she 'ad to lay on this thing all the time, and we used to go up and talk to her you know, and tell 'er what she's got to do and she'd do it, or we'd help her to do it if she couldn't, understand it sometimes you know but, I don't know what happened to them now, you don't see them now like you used to. And they must still be surely, unless they've got something they can make them better.

*Well maybe they have different kinds of wheelchairs or,*

Not the spinal one? Mm.

*Did you have lessons in that school? What do you remember about your lessons?*

Well no different than yours I s'pose. You know, they used to go, do it all the time. Sometimes you'd get them wrong, sometimes you got them right. [Laughs.]

*Was it boys and girls together?*

Mm.

*Big school or, do you remember?*

Yeah: but I always remember goin' across the Rye in this ambulance: horse drawn this was at the time, 'cos there wasn't motor cars so much then, and I used to think 'They're taking me through the country,' when you was kids you don't know what you're doing. Mind you I 'ad a good childhood I suppose, really. I often wonder, what I would have been like if I could do what they done those days: go back: lovely.

*You'd like to go back? What is it you miss?*

[23:09]

Well I think I'd, go back and be as right as I am now, I'd do a lot different.

*Do you think?*

Mm.

*What would you do different?*

Well, I'd make, I'd try and make my life a lot better, and that, 'cos while I'm stuck in a chair, I can't do a damn thing, you know and some people come, and they do take the mickey out of **you**, I said 'Don't you dare!' I said 'look' I said 'if anybody had told me I was goin' to end in a chair' I said 'I'd 'ave called 'em 'liars', I said 'you want to put your hand in front of you, thank God you can walk,' I said, I said 'I walked' I said 'but they used to take the mickey out of me but I still walked', and I said 'if they'd do that today I'd be happy,' I said 'Don't you ever take the mickey out of people, I said 'cos 'always remember, put your hand in front of you and say 'Thank you God, I can walk properly" I said 'cos no-one knows what's in front,' which is true: people don't stop to think, which they should do. I mean alright when kids used to follow me and say 'Oh look she's messed herself' I never took notice so much of that but when grownups started, that hurt me because they could understand that you couldn't, you didn't do that, you couldn't help it.

*Who were they Etty? Who were these grownups? Were they people you knew? Who were they?*

'Cos they didn't know me.

*They didn't know you, no. They were strangers.*

I mean, my mumma always used to say 'You've got to thank the Almighty, that everybody is happy' cos I broke her heart; 'cos she

was standing, she was cleaning windows at the time, she lived in  
Coborn Road Bow: do you know that?

Yes.

Do you know Mile End Station?

Yeah.

That turning down there, right down the bottom, underneath,  
there's a station down the bottom as well, railway, ordinary railway:  
Coburn Road, mm.

*And that's where you lived? So your mum was cleaning windows?*

Pardon?

*Your mum was cleaning windows?*

Mm, yeah and she had a fall.

*Oh. Was she doin' that as a job?*

Mm.

*Oh.*

Shame though but still one of those things you can't help: 'cos she didn't know she was carrying me at the time. [Laughs.] It's funny when you look back and think, suddenly how it can happen, and it don't come out on you and it comes out on the other person: funny though really I wonder why? I mean there's no answer to that is there?

*So can we talk about school again?*

Mm.

*Yeah. Do you remember other children did you have friends there?*

[26:46]

Yeah.

*Who do you remember?*

Well I think, I don't think we got on all that well together, 'cos some of them were very, they thought you was liked more than them and they didn't like you then and they used to take, make your life more of a misery, I never used to like going to school.

*Really?*

No.

*You didn't like it? Mm. What was it that you didn't like?*

Them, when they used to take the mickey out of me and

*So that happened in school as well or?*

Mm.

*Other children at the school?*

Oh yes. I think they got their own back in their own ways, they thought, made you look awful and feel awful but, I suppose I was silly to take notice but, you do, [laughing] unfortunately. I mean, as I said, I used to say to my mum, 'Why do grownups take the mickey Mum?' My mum used to say 'Darling I can't tell you,' she said 'I wish I could' but 'If I catch 'em God 'elp 'em' she'd 'ave killed them 'cos when she lost her temper, and she did 'ave a temper, I've got one like that [laughing] unfortunately, and that, I mean to say if someone upsets me, I let 'em know, and I turned round and said to 'em 'Don't ever take the mickey out of anyone: especially someone you know' I said 'cos always put your hand in front of you and say 'Thank God, I'm perfect', I said 'because no-one knows what's in front of them.' I said 'If if anybody had told my mum I was going to end up in one of these' I said 'she'd have called 'em liar.'

*So did anything happen at school? When, when children called you names? Did anyone stop it?*

[29:01]

Well the teachers tried but, they wouldn't do it in front of her, they'd wait 'til she wasn't there you know. But when they used to say 'Oh she's messed herself' I used I could never understand that.

*And what were the teachers like? Did you like the teachers?*

They wasn't too bad.

*What do you remember about them?*

Not a lot, I never used to like 'em. Thank God, thank God, going out of school I wouldn't go, I used to bunk off. [Laughs.] I remember I was goin' across the Rye to go to school and that, I said to the nurse I said 'I want to go the toilet' and I said, 'Can you drop me by the park?' 'cos in the park they'd got a toilet, and I went in there and I went out the other side.

*Did you? What did you do that day then?*

[31:09]

I bunked away. [Laughs.] And I made sure, if anybody followed me, I made sure they never did. But I always used to say to them, people should always put their hands in front of themselves and say 'Thank God it's not me.' I don't know why people do it though. I never understood that. Why is it people do mimic other people? And take the mickey? I mean here and now, 'cos now I am in a chair unfortunately, they say to me sometimes, 'Can't you get up and walk?' I say 'Do you think I'd be in this?' I said 'I think it could be you' I said 'If I could walk, my mum used to say to me, 'My Eddy could walk, and she had money, you wouldn't see 'er, she'd be travellin' all round the world, and I would, 'cos I'd love to go and see how the other half lived, and what made the world turn round, whether it was oranges or that. [Laughs.] I'd like to find out, even now.

*Yeah.*

Funny really, you've seen, I've seen things sometimes indoors you know when I'm, especially when I'm in bed of a night, and I think to myself 'You're layin' here Eddy, you can't do a damn thing, if you want to go to toilet you've gotta call someone. What's it all for? What you're alive for I don't know,' 'cos it's not a life really, and I don't know why some people really envy me. Why is it people do that? They turn round and say 'Oh you're better than us' I say 'No I'm not,' I said 'You can go where you want,' I said 'because if I could do it' I said 'I wouldn't be here,' I said 'I'd be out travellin' the world. I said 'cos I want to know what's goin' on.' [Laughs.] And I said 'My mum always said to me, 'You're a nosy little cow, you

want to know what everyone else is doing,' which is true: I do. I don't know why but I do, and I'd like to do it better. [Laughs.] Funny i'n't? Why I've got that idea I haven't got a clue. I mean I'd like to be able to get up and walk all round here, and say 'You can stick me chair, and I'm goin'.' I'd love it, still, I can't do that. Still I s'pose I'm lucky to be alive. But you should see my back, and my bottom I've got no bottom: it's all scarred, and that, look.

*What's that?*

[33:40]

Operation they had for there: all down me back, bum, legs: on me legs.

*You had lots of operations, yeah. Oh yeah.*

And yet I'm still here to tell the tale. [Laughs.] I often wonder, mind you my doctor I had he was Welsh, and he was only little but he was lovely, he used to come up and say to me 'And how's my Etty this morning?' I used to look at him, I said 'And how's you?' He said 'If you're alright I'm alright.' [Laughs.]

*When was that Etty? What doctor was that?*

Dr Ockin [ph.] Jones.

*When you were a kid? That was at Great Ormond Street was it?*

Great Portland Street.

*Great Portland Street? So you liked him?*

And when I had me leg in a sling. My brothers used to come and say 'We're gonna make a swing of you Etty' I'd say 'Go on then,' [laughs] and they used to push me legs 'cos they swung.

*So your brothers used to come and visit?*

Mm.

*Mm.*

And my mum, they used to say 'I bet Esther's mum's first through that door' and she was.

*She came as often as she could. Mm.*

I don't know why she was always the first one through the door, in the ward, and, they just, and if you had no visitors and you wanted something she'd asked you, 'cos when she'd used, prepared to go out she'd bring you, she'd bring it you for you she wouldn't take the money. 'No' she'd say, 'that's on your aunt: make out I'm your aunt' [laughs] and they used to call 'er 'auntie' in the end.

*What the children, the other children?*

Mm.

*Yeah.*

But she was really good to them and all: lovely really. I wonder if other people'd do it today? 'Cos people today are not as nice as they used, should be.

*You don't think?*

Not when they can still take the mickey out of you. 'Cos I mean when you're older, I think you should understand all that: and you know you should be able to, people should be able to understand, supposin' I could get up and walk, and they should, 'Bein' disabled she can't help it, that's the way, the (God) Almighty made 'er,' and that you know but they don't and when it's grownups it's really hurtful: I used to say to my mum 'Why is it grownups who say, 'Lovey I couldn't tell you.' She said 'But I daren't let your father take you out 'cos he'd God help? the grownups.' [Laughs] She said 'He'd get pinched more than anything else.' No it's a shocking thing, I can never understand why people take the mickey out of someone else.

*It sounds like it's gone on a long time.*

Oh yeah. Mm. Yes. And as I say, with kiddies yes, not with grownups.

*So can we think a bit about the school again Etty?*

Mm.

*Is that OK?*

[37:47]

Mm. It was alright alright at school I got on alright but, some of the teachers weren't all that nice but, you 'ad to put up with that.

*What did they do that wasn't nice?*

Well if you did something, say you'd done something wrong, they br..., bring a stick right across your knuckles.

*Really?*

Mm.

*How often would that happen do you think?*

Any time they saw you and that and they said 'Oh that's wrong,' you'd get a ruler right across the knuckles.

*Did that happen to you Etty?*

Ooh yes. But I made it up for 'im, I made, paid 'em out as I got bigger. I done something deliberately wrong at the time and I said 'Don't you dare!' I said 'You do it to me 'and I'm going to do it to you.'

*You said that to the teacher?*

Mm.

*What did they say?*

She looked at me. I said 'Yes I will!' I said 'You hit me one more' and I said 'that's all you gotta do: don't you dare do that again,' and I said, 'I'll have my dad down to you.' [Laughs.]

*Did you say you said that when you were older? When you were a bit bigger?*

Mm.

*Mm. So how long were you at that school then Etty?*

You stayed at you 'ad to stay at school 'til you was fifteen sixteen.

*So that's how, you were there 'til about fifteen? Yeah, that's a long time isn't it?*

Yeah because it was a special school and they taught you a trade, you see they taught me to knit and crochet.

*To knit?*

Mm.

*Oh I see.*

And crochet.

*And crochet. Did you enjoy that?*

Oh yeah, yeah.

*You did.*

I made some lovely things. I made this dress I've got on.

*Did you?*

I made, I used to make all me own clothes.

*What while you were at school?*

Yeah.

*Or after school?*

After school: and all that, 'cos.

*So what did they, what did they have you making at school then?*

We, well we tried to do lessons. As I said it was only if you made a mistake, she used to bring the ruler down across your knuckles and that and that ruler hurt! It really hurt, you know. I'll never forget the last day she done it I got hold of the ruler and snapped it, I said 'Now take it,' I says 'you won't hit anybody else with that.' She looked at me, I bet she could have killed me. I was waitin' for her to tell my mum but she never did: I don't know why: because I s'pose she would have told my mum and my mum would 'ave told 'er off.

*Did your mum did your mum know that they did that?*

Pardon?

*Do you think that your mum knew that they did that?*

Mm.

*Did you tell 'er? What did she think about that then?*

She thought it was shocking. But I don't know why people are like that though. Why are they cruel to you? I mean you've done nothing and yet, I don't s'pose it's kind of a jealousy is it?

*Could be.*

Why? I mean what's to be jealous about me in this? I can't do a damn thing.

*So when you were at school, do you remember what the building was like? Can you take me round the building in your, in your head, in your mind's eye?*

[42:15]

We 'ad a, upstairs, I used to go up the stairs, and come down 'em; but I, I think it was as you got older you went up the stairs: but I never done that so much because I didn't like the steps.

*Did you find the steps hard?*

Mm.

*Did anyone help you get around the school? Did you get help?*

Sometimes, sometimes they wouldn't help you, sometimes they did, I think it was all accordin' to what mood they were in, if they was in a good mood you'd get on alright but if they was in a bad God 'elp you. Why I don't know, why they done all that, I mean 'cos we couldn't help it. I never understood it, I wish I could 'ave done, even today I don't understand it. Why are people so horrible, to one another like that?

*Did you have any school trips?*

[43:35]

We used to go to, Eastbourne or places like that, but one day I got left at Eastbourne, and it cost me a hundred pounds to get home.

*You got left behind?*

No, what happened, they got them in the ambulance and they went off and they left me behind, and I had to get a taxi to take me home and he charged a hundred quid, but they paid it.

*I should think so.*

I said young man I can't pay it' and I don't know why they done it: I think it was one I got one teacher there that doesn't like you and I don't know why, I couldn't tell you.

*Do you think they meant to leave you behind?*

Mm.

*Do you?*

I mean I never, understood why people like to dislike people, couldn't, 'cos I don't understand that even today.

*Who was that teacher then? Can you remember who that was?*

Oh I think she left after a while. I don't know where she went, but I think something nasty happened to 'er, and my mum always used to say 'Don't forget, if you do spiteful things it comes home to roost' and it's true: but still it's too late, when they do these things, they should stop and think, and put their hands together and say 'Thank God it's not happened to me.' I don't understand why they do it. I used to cry me eyes out, and I wasn't very old. [Laughs.] I wonder why even today I don't understand it. I try to find out what it's all about, but I can't. Unless it was as I say a bit of jealousy. What to be jealous God knows. 'Cos if I thought you needed help I'd help you: as I, as I am even now, I mean I'd like to help everyone, that needs it, and I've 'ad people come and ask for my help and I done it: yet I can't help meself. I wonder why? Funny i'n it? Life's funny though. They say 'Life's what you make it,' it's true. My mum always used to say 'If you can help somebody and it helps you, do it,' but I don't know what she'd say now if she was here.

*I think the two of you were very close. Yeah.*

I can never understand why people went out of their way to hurt someone else: unless as Mumma, as Mum said it might be jealousy, but I said 'What have they got to be jealous about Mum?' She said 'Darling, don't ask me, I couldn't tell you' she said. She said 'You'd be surprised how people are jealous.' I couldn't, I can't even understand it today. I mean what's to be jealous today? I mean if you wanted something really bad, and you couldn't really afford it I'd turn round and say 'Here you are,' because to me it's a pleasure: but why it's not to them I don't know. And why they want to hurt someone I know I'll never ever know.

*So can we go back to school? Just for, to talk about that for a bit?*

Mm.

*So Etty you used to get an ambulance to school every day.*

Mm, yeah.

*To school and back?*

[48:30]

We used to go across the park and as I used to say I was in the country and that and the teachers was very good, and that, a mixed class we 'ad, boys and girls together, and, and that, and I 'ad a boy behind me he used to leave me notes on his, 'I love you, will you be my sweetheart?' and I thought it was lovely. [Laughs.] It's funny when you're a kid, you're daft.

*Did you, did you do 'im notes back?*

Yeah.

*Did you?*

Lovely that was. I used to say 'Oh I'm goin' to school goin' to see me boyfriend.' [Laughs.] My mum used to say 'What's that?' I said 'I gotta boyfriend!' 'Ooh!' and she laughed but, I don't know what stopped it all: all of a sudden it just stopped, dead.

*What school?*

Mm.

*Did it? You don't remember leaving?*

No.

*It just stopped? Mm.*

Whether the teacher got the sack because she was cruel to some of us and that and they found out, and they didn't like it, and they couldn't get anyone else to take her place, but I don't know what 'appened really: I often wonder what.

*So you don't remember leaving the school?*

No.

*You think the school closed?*

Mm.

*Really? Oh.*

No it was very funny, I could never understand it any of it.

*So what did you do after that then Etty?*

[50:25]

Well I went out, I was taught, hem, dress making.

*Dress making?*

Mm.

*That was your first job was it? You must have been quite young.*

Yeah we used to be apprentice in those days.

*Oh I see.*

They don't do it today they stopped it all: shame really but, that's where I taught to use a machine, and that and I used to do the button 'oles,'cos you had to do them by hand, count how many button holes in the corner there, ten no more than ten. [Laughs.]

*Do you remember where that was Etty? Do you remember where?*

Peckham I think.

*Peckham?*

Holdron's.

*Holdon's? Was it? And that was like a dressmaker's? Mm.*

Lovely though, when I look back now, it's all gone. Holdron's has gone, they choose to teach lovely kids, she was a lovely woman, really really nice, and that.

*She was in charge of you? Yeah.*

And they sacked her: I don't know why.

*And how many of you did the apprenticeship?*

Six of us I think.

*And she taught you all?*

Mm. Needlework. Lovely, 'cos they, it was more for us bein' disabled than the others, 'cos they turned round and said, 'The others could go out and earn a living where we had to, some of us 'ad to stay home and do it,' and that, but if you could go out and get a job, who was it, one of the girls were goin' to one of the big shops over the West End, and that so: got good money over there.

*So those six girls, were they girls that you'd been at school with?*

Mm.

*They were? So maybe it was something that the school arranged, did they?*

Mm. We'd got this apprenticeship you see and then when after you served it, if you say Holdron's wanted someone they put you in there, and we 'ad to do Finework.

*What was Finework?*

Well say you tore your dress, and I 'ad to patch it together, and it's got to look as though it's never been done, and I used to do all that. When I look back now and think 'I can't do it now 'cos me eyes are no good' but, I used to love it. I wonder what 'appened to all that now? If they go, taught girls still to do that. Shame if they didn't, because, you could get a good living. Then my mum bought me a machine and I used to do make me own dresses home, and I used to make a load of them, but the thing was, my cousins always thought if I made a dress for them I shouldn't charge 'em, I said 'Look, I've gotta earn a living and this is my living.'

*So that's how you earned a living?*

Mm.

*You made dressed for people? Where did you sell them Etty?  
Where did you sell them?*

When I was at home.

*From home? So people just knew to come to you, they'd say 'I need a dress, I'll go and see Etty.'*

Mm. Oh yeah, my mumma made a room, and I had this room on me own with all of the things in it.

*In the house? Mm.*

Oh she was very good. She was a lovely mum. The day she went and that was my finish. Broke my heart that did.

*When did that happen Eddy?*

I think she had a fall, and I don't know what happened.

*Were you quite young, then?*

Yeah. No it was a shame. Still I earned a living, thanks to her. No she always used to say 'You've got to learn to make care, take care of yourself love, and don't let anybody hurt you,' and she said 'Stand up for yourself,' and I did! Mm. 'Cos one day, some lady comes and started taking the mickey. I lost me temper then, I went 'Don't you dare!' I said 'look' I says 'you don't know what's in front of you.' I said 'You should put your hands together and thank the Almighty there's nothing wrong with you.' I said 'cos I said 'If anybody had told me I was going to end up in a chair' I said 'I'd 'ave called 'em liars'.' I said 'But it's happened, but out of the blue,' I said 'Why I don't know,' I said I s'pose it's meant to be, ' and that but oh honestly, she looked at me, I 'ad her crying in the end. [Laughs.] She said 'I'm sorry' I said 'Yes you wanna be.' I said 'If you can do things properly, do it, and you can help one another, do it.' I said 'My mum always told me that: to help one another,'

So

She was a lovely mum though. I was only young when she died.

*How old were when she died?*

I think I was in me, twenties or thirties.

*Were you still at home?*

Mm.

*Yeah, still with her.*

But, shame, still, when it's your time to go it's your time to go.

*So Etty we're nearly close to finishing off now today. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your schooldays? Anything you haven't said?*

[57:52]

No, no, nothing exciting really.

*It doesn't have to be exciting.*

No. I wish it would 'ave been. I would have loved something exciting to 'ave 'appened. Still,

*What do you think you'd change about school if you could, if you could do something different?*

Well I think I'd try to make it a bit more interested in things because, unless you say you're interested in something, what 'ave you got in life? And as my mum always told me, to help one another and, if I could help them to do it, she said 'Because you never know what's in front of you,' which is true: [voice in the background] but the thing is, I don't know, people are so different today. I don't think they want to help one another like what they used to do. I don't know whether you find that? Why?

*I don't know Eddy.*

I mean even today, they're jealous 'cos I'm in this, I say 'Swop!' I said 'you wouldn't do.' I said 'If I could walk like I used to,' I said 'and they took the mickey out of me' I said 'I wouldn't care a bugger' I said because I could help one another then, I said 'I can't do a thing in the chair.' They looked at me, I said 'Yes you want to put your hands together and say 'Thank God I can do this' because Eddy can't.' I said 'If you needed [coughs] help, and I've got it, I'll help you.' I said 'Never be afraid to ask.' They looked at me and they said 'What even now?' I said 'Yes.' They couldn't believe me I don't think. I don't understand why they won't help one another like they used to: 'cos you've got nothing to be jealous of. How can you be jealous of somebody that can't walk?

*I think we need more people like you.*

No there's only one of me. [Both laugh.] No it's a shocking thing though. You go out, you see people, they they look at one another as though they're a load of, muck and I don't like that. No, my mum always said 'Help someone if you can love, and even if you can't don't do them any harm,' and that I wouldn't do, and if you wanted my last shilling, I'd give it to you, and that's the truth.

*Mm, I believe you. OK Etty I think we're gonna finish up now because I think you're, you're about due for your lunch. [Laughs.]*

Yes!

*OK so I'm gonna stop recording.*

Come on! [Both laugh.]

[End of recording]